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**CONTACT:** Nancy Guccione  
WIRED Program Manager, Montana Department of Commerce  
(406) 841-2744

Marissa Kozel  
Montana Department of Commerce  
(406) 841-2772

## **Montana Department of Commerce Supports Online Energy Education through \$572,734 WIRED Grant**

(HELENA) – The Montana Department of Commerce has awarded the University of Montana a \$572,734 WIRED grant for a new, online, distance education program to train energy technicians through the Missoula College of Technology.

The two-year, Associate of Applied Science degree program will be offered through the Department of Applied Computing and Electronics at the UM College of Technology, starting in the fall of 2007. The curriculum will introduce students to traditional, emerging, renewable, and alternative energy technologies, and offer significant internship and networking opportunities.

“Creating an online, energy technology, degree program is a recipe for success for our students and our economy,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “Our young people are the future of this state, and a program like this will ensure that Montanans remain leaders in innovative energy development.”

The program will be offered in partnership with Dawson Community College, Miles Community College, and Montana Tech of the UM College of Technology. The UM College of Technology is working closely with the Montana State University College of Technology to ensure its programs are complementary. Partnerships with Montana Tribal Colleges are also being pursued.

“Montana has endless potential for energy development and a workforce trained in energy technologies is in high demand,” said Anthony Preite, Director of the Montana Department of Commerce. “The online program at the Missoula College of Technology will provide educational and networking opportunities to countless students who are challenged by the vast and rural nature of our state.”

The WIRED program is focused on supporting projects that directly involve job training and job creation in bio-product business development across the 32 county WIRED region in eastern and central Montana and on Montana's six Indian reservations.

The WIRED program has \$1.3 million available in 2007 for customized worker training for businesses working with universities, colleges, high schools, and other training providers on specialized bio-product training and curriculum development. The program will also provide grants for WIRED eligible job training programs or projects that will enhance and expand the bio-product industry in the WIRED region.

Montana's WIRED program was created as a result of Governor Brian Schweitzer's commitment to value added agricultural energy projects. In January 2006, the U.S. Department of Labor approved Governor Schweitzer's application for the WIRED initiative. Montana's application was one of only 13 approved nationwide.

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